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ABSTRACT

This study is a history of the societal-problems approach in social studies education as revealed in secondary school social studies textbooks used in Problems of Democracy courses from 1895 to 1985. The central thesis is that the definition of the problems approach and the problems selected for study by educators as illustrated by the textbooks reflect their definitions of the "worthy society," their values, hopes, fears, and political beliefs, as well as the crucial issues of the day and underlying power relationships in American society. Beyond explaining the origins, development, and decline of the problems approach, the study includes a critical analysis of the "problems" selected for study, textbook space allocation, treatment of specific problems that reflect ideology, and the conception of a problem put forth by various educators. The study used quantitative methods to examine 135 textbooks in order to determine the average number of text pages devoted to 60 "problems" falling into 7 major problem areas during each time period: skills, citizenship, personal, international, social, economic, and political. The central finding of the study is that treatment of societal problems was determined primarily by the internal norms of educators; their values, educational philosophy, and political beliefs; and their perception of the problems of American society. (TE)

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Problems of Democracy: A Case Study in Curricular Change

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Presented at the Annual Conference of the
New England Educational Research Organization
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Amercian society faces innumerable problems, some obvious, others hidden or structural. Ours is a society in which general prosperity masks social stratification and the existence of a relatively permanent underclass, disproportionately minority. Despite a lot of talk about critical thinking among social studies professionals, a discipline-centered approach seems dominant. We know that bland textbooks are the central tool of the profession, and that students are generally bored. (Shaver, Davis, & Helburn,1979) In short, social studies as currently practiced is failing to provide the kind of stimulating introduction to the realities of life in America and the world that many feel is necessary.

Despite this general failure, we have a long tradition of curricula devoted to societal issues and problems, but that tradition is at low ebb. Problems of Democracy, once a common senior elective, gave serious attention to problems and issues in our society. How did curricular attention to issues first develop? How did it change over the years? Why has it declined? An examination of the historical development of the societal problems approach may provide some answers.

This is a history of the societal-problems approach in social studies education as it revealed itself in textbooks, especially those used in the Problems of Democracy course. (Evans, 1986) The study is focused on secondary school social studies textbooks which explicitly discuss societal problems and issues, published from 1895-1985. The central thesis of the study is that the definition of the problems approach and the problems selected for study by educators as illustrated by the textbooks reflect their definitions of the "worthy society," their values, hopes, fears, and political beliefs, as well as the crucial issues of the day and

underlying power relationships in American society. For those selecting the problems, the "worthy society" would be one in which the problems studied are overcome.

Beyond explaining the origins, development, and decline of the problems approach, the study includes a critical analysis of the "problems" selected for study, textbook space allocation, treatment of specific problems which reflect ideology, and the conception of a problem put forth by various educators. Hopefully, this investigation will help us better understand past efforts to reform the social studies, their impact on the curriculum, and the aspirations and anxieties behind them. The central research questions include:

1. What led to the development of curricular attention to societal issues and problems?

2. What have secondary school textbooks said about our nation's problems? How and why did those textbooks change in different decades?

3. Why has textbook attention to societal problems declined in recent years?

4. What does the history of teaching about societal problems tell us about curricular change in the social studies?

As Jean Anyon notes, "Textbooks are social documents that can be examined in the context of their time, place and function." (1979, p. 361) Like Anyon, I am exploring the possibility that an ideology is expressed in the content of textbooks that might serve the interests of some groups in society more than others. Social studies textbooks presenting an analysis

of societal problems or issues present an organization and selection of information which provides an interpretation of society, of its problems and possibilities, which necessarily reflects an ideological predisposition. Textbooks also provide, I am convinced, the single best source on the content taught in the social studies classrooms of the past. Numerous research investigations have shown that social studies instruction is primarily textbook oriented. Textbooks are viewed as the central tool of instruction and the most important source of knowledge in most classrooms (Shaver, et al., 1979).

But what determines the content of textbooks? Textbook authors operate within a field of forces which mediate the content which students eventually read. First, textbook authors see the objective problems of society. These problems have some impact on what goes into the textbooks, though public concerns are not directly reflected in text contents. Second, educators perceptions of the problems of society are shaped by their internal norms, their values, attitudes, and beliefs. Of course these internal norms are themselves influenced by a variety of forces within the educational establishment: changing concepts of pedagogy, changing views of the purpose of schools, curriculum recommendations by national commissions, and the conventional wisdom of educators.

Finally, textbooks publishers operate within a market which moderates text contents. Because of pressures and criticisms from various groups, publishers find it necessary to avoid controversial materials. As Frances Fitzgerald notes in *America Revised*, textbooks are "designed not to please anyone, but to be acceptable to as many as possible." They are a

compromise which reflect "a vision of America sculpted and sanded down by pressures of diverse interest groups." (Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 46-7)

Generally speaking though, the market situation within which textbooks are produced and sold supports a non-critical form of citizenship transmission (Cherryholmes, 1983, p. 350). In order to maximize profits and win adoption on state approved lists, often in conservative areas of the country, text companies develop a product designed not to offend persons with a conservative orientation. This factor has played an important role in the history of the problems approach and must be considered in any study relying on textbooks as evidence.

Though textbooks serve as the primary source of evidence for this study, I have also attempted to relate scholarly discourse within education and trends in our nation's history as these help provide a context within which the changing treatment of societal problems is more understandable. Textbook space allocation was compared with public concerns as evidenced by opinion polls in response to "What is the most important problem facing the nation?" in an effort to determine to what extent public concerns entered the textbooks. Political party platform served as a surrogate for opinion polls for the earlier eras for which poll data is not available.

The changes illustrated by the data examined for this study offer long term textual evidence for the analysis of curricular change. Is curriculum change an incremental, internal process, controlled by the experts and guided by philosophical postions and research findings, or is the curriculum permeable, shaped by crises in the larger society, by external forces to which educators only respond? The reality is neither black nor

white, but a shade of gray. Boyd points out that "Although analysts typically have concluded that educational policy-making is preponderantly incremental, there is a very real sense in which the ambivalence that Kirst and Walker (1971) display on the subject is justified. When one examines the nature of curriculum policy-making closely there is a paradoxical appearance of incremental and non-incremental policy-making going on simultaneously." (1979) Both of these strains are present in the data in this study. If, through analysis of the evidence presented by these texts, we can discover which type of curriculum policy-making has had the dominant impact on teaching about societal problems, perhaps we can draw lessons which will help guide future efforts at curriculum reform.

Method

The study used quantitative methods to examine a sample of 135 textbooks in order to determine the average number of text pages devoted to 60 "problems" falling into seven major problem areas during each time period. I developed a coding sheet for each source on which I recorded the total number of pages devoted to each topic as listed in the table of contents. This data was loaded into a computer using an integrated spreadsheet software program that displayed the results in tabular and graphic form. The sample included textbooks and pamphlet series that provided substantial treatment of societal problems and issues and that "fused" content from more than one academic discipline. Most of the textbooks included were used in the Problems of Democracy course. Changes in the texts were then compared with changes in public perceptions as illustrated by public opinion data on the percentage of people citing a given problem as "the most important problem facing the

nation."

The study also employed detailed content analysis of three texts from each time period to discover the concept of a problem guiding content selection and the ideology underlying treatment of specific topics including the role of government in the economy, treatment of the culturally different, and discussion of competing ideologies.

Results

Treatment of societal problems has undergone numerous significant changes over the years included in the study. The central finding of the study is that treatment of societal problems was determined primarily by the internal norms of educators, their values, educational philosophy, and political beliefs and their perception of the problems of American society. Changing concepts of pedagogy, curriculum recommendations by national commissions, and the conventional wisdom of educators have also played a major role in shaping textbook contents. Finally, the mediating process of textbook publishing which is sensitive to criticism and external pressures has had a profound impact on textbook contents, especially in more recent periods. Generally, the evidence presented in the study shows that text contents change slowly and do not mirror public opinion which is more volatile. Nevertheless, public concerns have had some influence on treatment of problems and space allocation, often after some lag. Qualitative evidence shows that treatment of specific topics changes more rapidly than space allocation, perhaps because it is much easier to change a few passages than an entire section.

Civics texts of the period from 1895-1916 focused on citizenship transmission through study of the structure-of-government and featured a

heavy emphasis on student participation in the life of the community and the practical affairs of daily living. They were shaped by an ideology interested primarily in adjusting students to citizenship and transmitting allegiance and duty to serve the nation, but they were also influenced by progressive concerns over corruption, immigration, and extremes of wealth and poverty. Instruction which directly addressed societal problems and civic responsibility arose from the concerns of educators who sought to transmit their small town pietist values to a society that was increasingly urban and industrial, filled with immigrants and beset with problems. Civic education in this period served to train citizens in allegiance to the nation and community, to assimilate large numbers of new immigrants and to imbue them with American values and culture. (Tyack and Hansot, 1982)

Official creation of the Problems of Democracy course in 1916 marked the start of a new era in which social amelioration, the moderate reform agenda of progressivism, became a more explicit goal. The course entered the curriculum gradually, following the recommendation of the Social Studies Committee appointed by the NEA Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, the same commission which produced *Cardinal Principles*. (NEA, 1916) The course was recommended by the committee as an answer to the rival claims of the respective social sciences for a place in the curriculum and combined content from political science, sociology, and economics into a fused offering that examined actual problems or issues. Underlying the advent of the Problems of Democracy course were the small town pietist values of progressive educators who sought to transmit a "social gospel" of societal redemption

through the curriculum. (Evans, 1986) Educators of that generation had a view of social evolution which held that people could improve their world through education, hence attention to piecemeal reform in problems texts. (Tyack and Hansot, 1982) Space allocation in Problems and Civics textbooks from the 1917-1930 period shifted from the structure-of-government approach to a tenuous balance among the disciplines of sociology, political science, and economics as shown in figure 1. This shift came as textbook writers and publishers, who shared a faith in the secular social gospel, adopted many of the recommendations of the 1916 Social Studies Committee.

Enrollment in the Problems of Democracy course grew slowly, amounting to only 1.04% of total enrollment in public secondary schools, grades 9-12 by 1928. Figure 2, comparing enrollments in Problems of Democracy with enrollments in American History shows that at its peak, only a relatively small percentage of students had the problems course (National Center for Education Statistics, 1984; U.S. Office of Education, 1964). It was a major elective but never achieved the status of a required course on any widespread basis. The growth of the course was made possible by the pervasive influence of progressive educators who championed innovative pedagogy and social improvement.

By the 1930's, the reform agenda of the social gospel reached its peak impact on the problems curriculum, spurred by the economic disaster of the depression and the reconstructionist vision of the schools as an instrument of reform. The reconstructionists believed that laissez-faire individualism was dead, that some form of collectivist planning and social control was inevitable, and that the schools should play a critical role in

Figure 1: Textbook Comparison

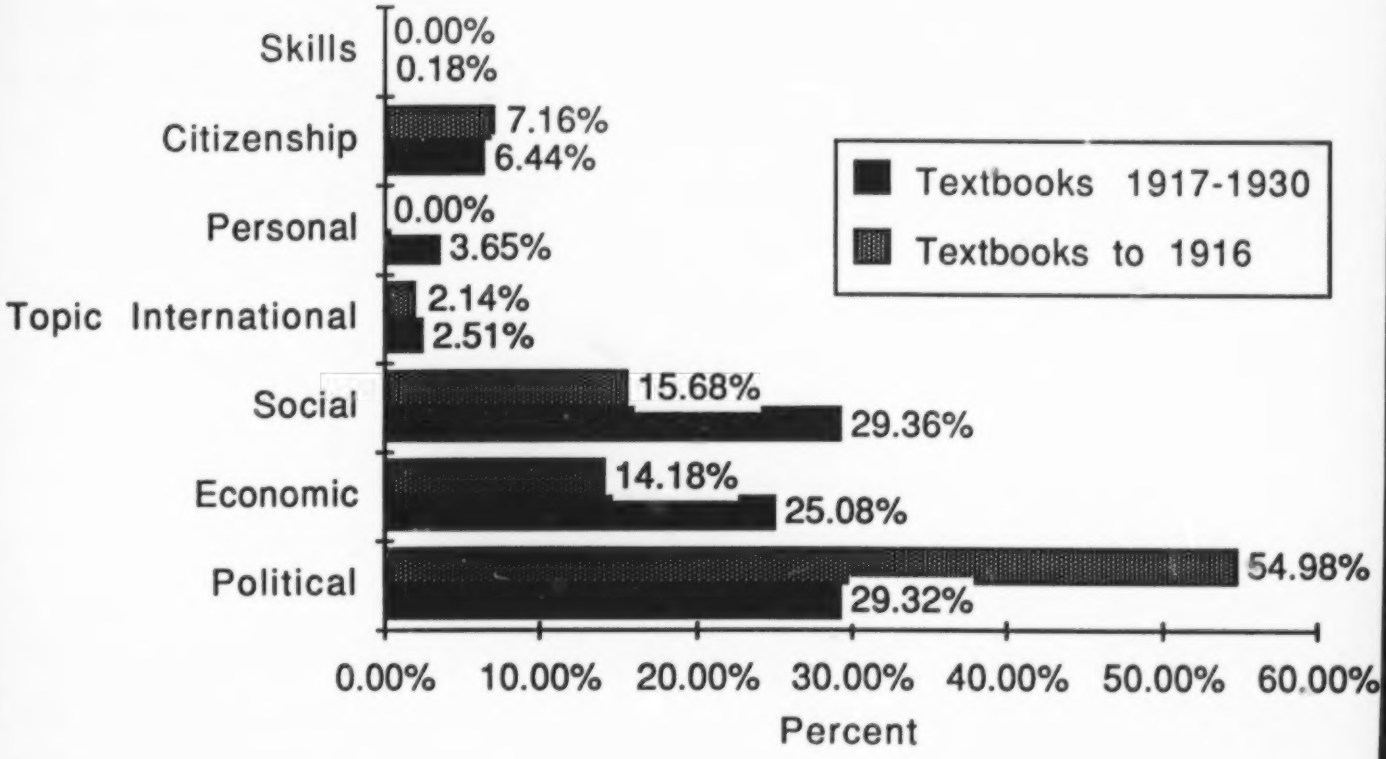
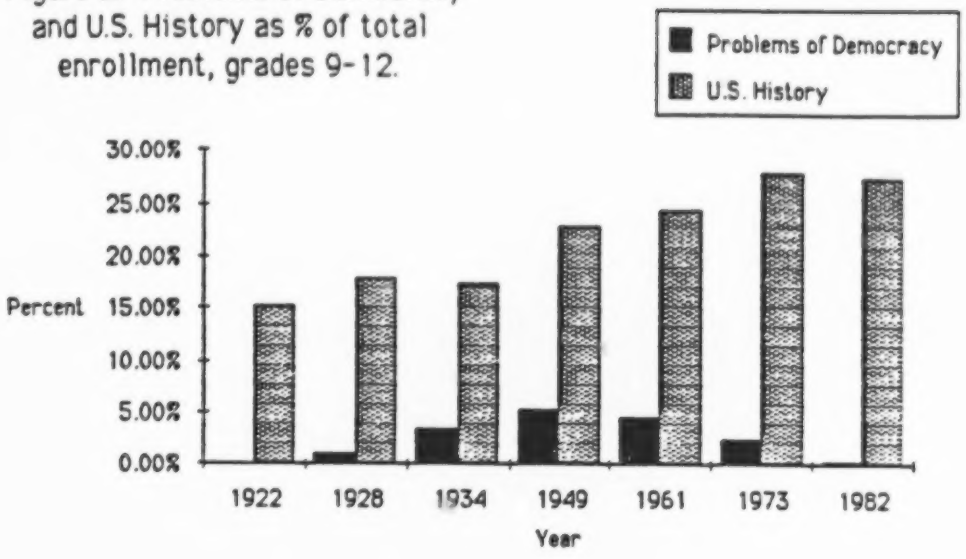


Figure 2: Problems of Democracy and U.S. History as % of total enrollment, grades 9-12.



its creation. This ideology found its way into the problems texts of the mid-late 1930's and early 1940's. Texts focused on the institutional origins of problems and posed the possibility of institutional change as solution, focusing attention on economic planning and social welfare. Due to culture lag, problems textbooks published during World War II devoted dramatically increased attention to social welfare concerns, though discussion of the benefits of economic planning was toned down as propaganda and patriotism became more pressing interests.

The post-war era ushered in an ideologically denatured problems approach, in which social efficiency as embodied in the life adjustment movement and the threat of communism rose to the forefront, making the problems curriculum nearly as superficial as its critics had long charged. Texts of the era exhibit the direct impact of cold war ideology in their failure to discuss radical alternatives and their direct anti-communism. Both the problems approach and progressivism received sharp criticism during the 1940's and 1950's, from political conservatives and traditionalist educators. A study of textbooks commissioned by the National Association of Manufacturers led to a New York Times headline, February 22, 1941, which read, "Un-American Tone Seen in Textbooks on Social Sciences... Distorted Emphasis on Defects of Democracy." Similar attacks on textbooks and teachers deemed too controversial played a major role in the denaturing of the problems curriculum and its ultimate decline. Ironically, it was during this period (1949) that enrollment in Problems of Democracy reached a peak of 5.24% of total enrollment, grades 9-12.

Texts of the 1946-1960 era reflect a dominant concern with personal

problems such as getting along with others, home and school adjustments, vocation and social relationships. One text sampled devoted nearly one-half of its pages to personal problems, with the aim of adjusting students to the society rather than educating them to help reform it. By 1961, enrollments began to erode, falling to 4.63% of total enrollment, grades 9-12. This decline was most likely due to attacks on progressivism and "life adjustment." Textbooks of the 1960's continued to embrace a denatured approach with a shift in emphasis from life-adjustment to the process of problem solving. The threat of communist totalitarianism was combined with an upbeat view of "free enterprise" to produce problems texts which offered little penetrating analysis of controversial issues. More than in any previous periods, the problems curriculum of the postwar era and of the 1960's was shaped by external crises and constraints as cold war concerns and attacks on supposed subversives restricted the public's zone of toleration and what editors felt they could publish. Conservative groups had been so successful that they had nothing more to complain about: the texts had become a reflection of the National Association of Manufacturer's viewpoint. (Fitzgerald, p. 37)

During the most recent period, problems texts disappeared. By 1982 enrollment in Problems of Democracy had fallen to 0.27% of total enrollment, grades 9-12. In Civics textbooks, attention to societal problems partially returned to the structure-of-government approach, leading to less discussion of issues and alternative views. The central purpose of the texts of the 1971-1985 period was citizenship transmission. They also illustrated a shift toward questioning the role of

"big government" and devoted less attention to social welfare concerns. Competing ideologies continued to be treated as a threat, though cold war rhetoric was replaced by discussion of containment and a very positive portrayal of the free market economy.

Thus, teaching about societal problems had come full circle, making a partial return to pre-World War I traditions. Curricular attention to societal problems and issues declined because the network of progressive educators and the social gospel in which they believed had largely disappeared. In the era in which the problems approach was born, Americans placed great faith in the power of schooling to redeem society. By the 1970's that faith had faltered. In no small way, the textbooks themselves may have precipitated the decline of the problems curriculum as their intellectual vitality deteriorated into a bland and superficial treatment of piecemeal and individual concerns which were parts of larger institutional problems. Like Progressivism in education, the Problems of Democracy course died of old age. By the early 1970's the course had a tarnished, old-fogey image. The New Social Studies, largely discipline-centered, and the subsequent mini-course explosion offered many new alternatives, and Problems of Democracy seemed out of step with current fashions. The red-baiting and conservative attacks on problems texts of earlier periods had taken their toll and may be ultimately responsible.

Were these changes in textbook attention to and treatment of issues guided by forces internal or external to the educational establishment? Evidence on textbook space allocation and detailed treatment of specific topics suggests that in this case, curricular change was simultaneously

internal and external, though affecting different topics in different ways and at different times.

Internal

Political Topics. Textbooks of the earliest and the latest periods examined in this study devoted more attention to the structure-of-government, a traditional focus of the discipline of political science. Figure 3, textbook pages devoted to political topics, clearly illustrates the impact of the societal problems approach on the curriculum as texts shifted from heavy emphasis on the structure-of-government to an interdisciplinary issue-centered approach and back again. The first major change, from 54.98% in the earliest period to 29.32% in the 1917-1930 era, came as a direct result of the recommendation of the 1916 Social Studies Committee through which the social gospel entered the curriculum, establishing a tenuous balance among the disciplines of political science, sociology, and economics. From the decade of the 1920's to the post-war era, attention to political topics declined even further due to increased emphasis on social welfare concerns and a shift toward the personal problems approach and international topics. The return to the structure-of-government approach during the most recent eras came with attacks on life-adjustment and increased emphasis on the structure-of-the-discipline approach as the problems course and the network of reform rhetoric which supported it all but disappeared. Figure 4 shows little correspondence between public concerns over political topics and the textbooks. Public concern over political topics has remained relatively low, usually under 10% of those responding, while textbook space devoted to political topics has changed significantly.

Figure 3: Textbook Pages Devoted to Political Topics.

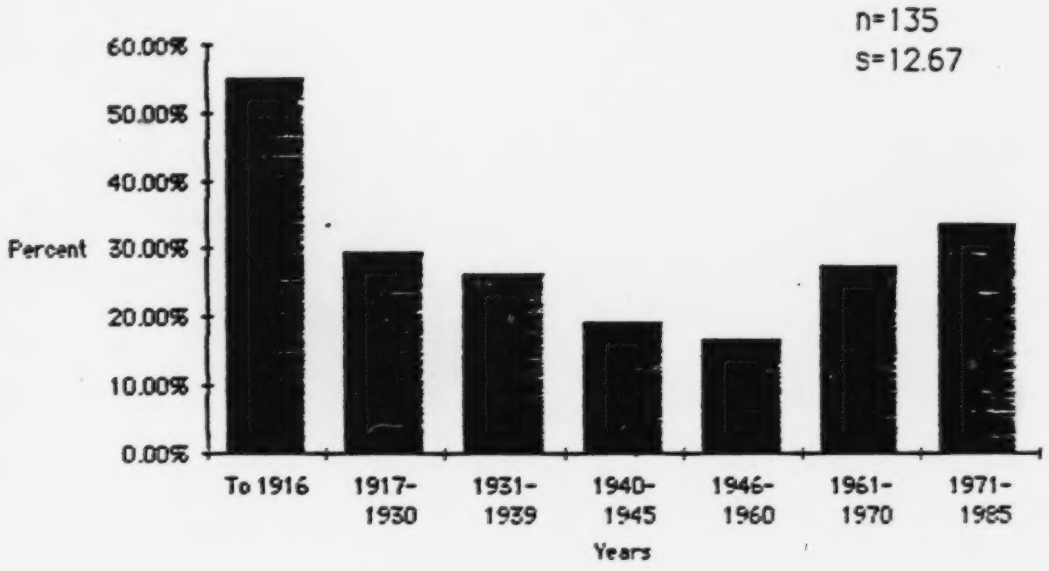
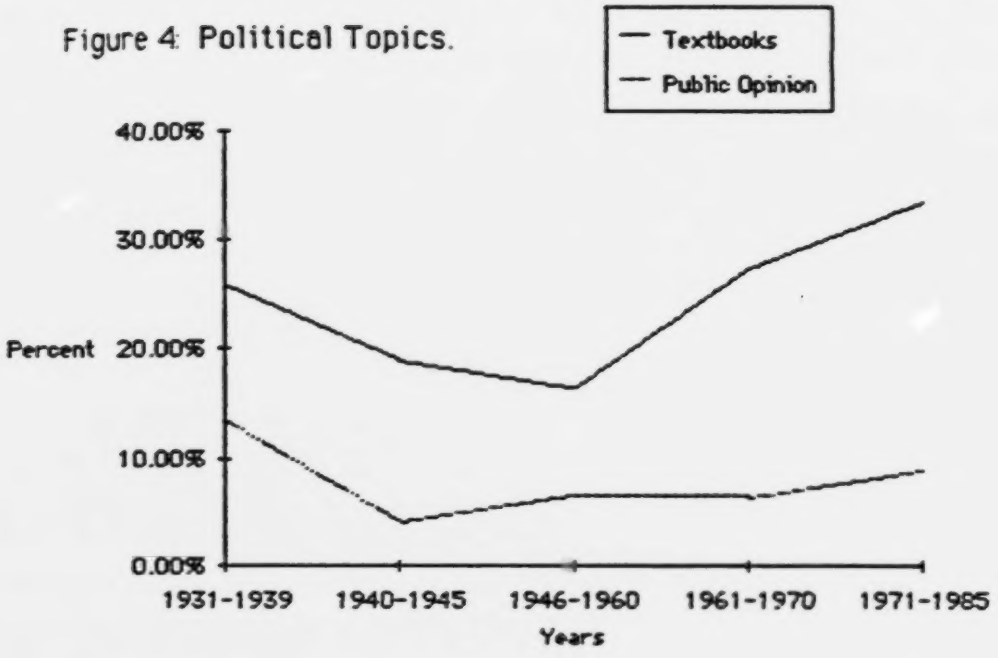


Figure 4: Political Topics.

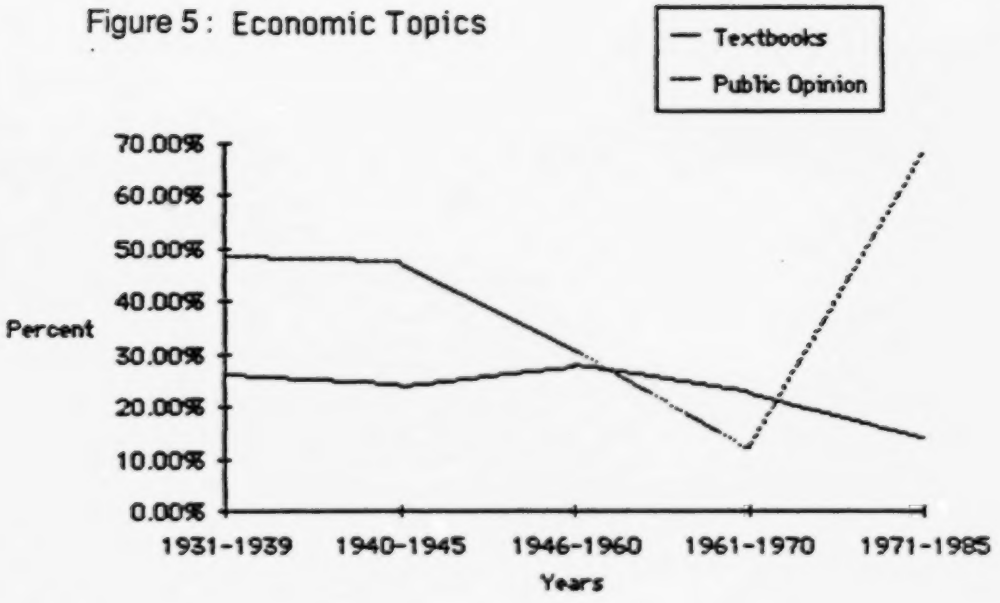


(Gallup, 1972, etc.) In sum, textbook attention to political topics was seemingly guided by trends within education and shows little direct relationship to the climate of public opinion.

Economic Topics. Textbook pages devoted to economic topics illustrates the impact of the changes which shaped treatment of political topics, though in reverse. The first major shift, from 14.18% in the earliest period to 25.08% in the 1917-1930 era came following the recommendations of the 1916 Social Studies Committee through which the social gospel shaped the curriculum. Attention to economic issues remained fairly constant from 1917-1970, then in the 1970's the texts began to shift back to the structure-of-government approach and hence devoted less space to economic topics. Figure 5, a comparison of public opinion data with space allocated to economic topics, shows no relationship. During the depression and war, public concern over economics was high, yet the texts of the period made no significant change in space allocation. In the most recent period, textbook space devoted to economic topics declined with the return to a more traditional civics despite peak public concern over the economy.

Though space allocation was mediated by textbook authors and the publishing process, treatment of specific topics showed the impact of societal trends more clearly. Texts of the earliest period were uneasy with governmental control and supported limited regulation only as necessary to protect the public from the abuses of big business. The texts of the 1920's reflect progressive support for a strong regulatory role, though that role was minimal. The texts of the 1930's and early 1940's demonstrate a major ideological shift, from a time of limited government

Figure 5: Economic Topics



regulation of the economy, to an era of big government in which the federal role in the economy was dramatically expanded to include not only a stronger regulatory role, but major involvement in social welfare and economic planning as well.

Texts of the 1950's and 1960's failed to raise many of the key economic issues that had been given considerable attention during the reform era. They seemed less concerned with economic problems and more concerned with proclaiming the benefits of the "free enterprise" system. By the 1970's, the texts had increasingly begun to question the role of big government, as inflation became a major concern and a new conservatism began to exert its influence. In sum, textbook treatment of the role of government in regulating business and the economy followed changes in the role of government and mainstream ideological shifts in what that role should be, though space allocated to economic topics showed no relation to such changes and was largely guided instead by internal factors.

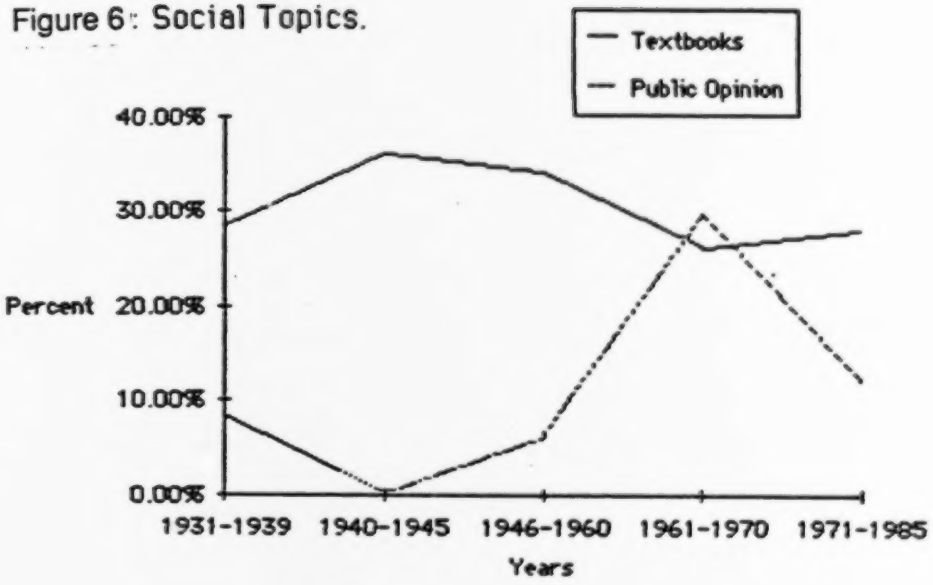
Social Topics. Textbook space devoted to social topics over time provides further evidence of the impact of the values and norms of educators on the problems curriculum. Initially, textbook pages devoted to social topics followed a pattern somewhat similar to that for economic topics. The first major shift, from 15.68% in the earliest period to 29.36% in the 1917-1930 period, illustrates the impact of the 1916 Social Studies Committee on the problems curriculum. However, attention to social topics rose to a peak of 36.02% during World War II, as texts of that period responded to the delayed impact of progressive educators concerns with social reconstruction, concern which flourished during the depression. Space allocated to social topics declined during the 1960's to

26.23% because of increased attention to international concerns brought on by the cold war and because of the return to the structure-of-the-discipline approach inspired by 1950's critics of the schools. Figure 6, which compares public opinion with textbook space allocation, shows little correspondence. Concern over social topics was fairly low during the 1930's as the public was more concerned with joblessness and economic displacement. Public concern over social topics peaked during the 1960's with concern over poverty and civil rights, though the denatured texts of the 1960's and 1970's showed only slight response.

Detailed treatment of the government's role in providing for the general social welfare reflects general trends in the government's role and ideological shifts of the mainstream. In the earliest period, the government role in providing for social welfare was minimal, as the texts stressed the role of charity. Government was to provide support only for the "defective" or "dependent" classes. In the 1920's the main concern seemed to be making private relief efforts more efficient by providing organizational help, reflecting the social welfare approach of progressivism. In the 1930's, textbooks for the first time supported stong government action to provide for social welfare, including direct relief, employment, and housing. The texts typically urged a new collective responsibility for economic security. Texts of the war period gave more attention than ever to social welfare concerns, reflecting acceptance of this new governmental role.

However, by the post-war era the texts took a different attitude, displaying a tendency to focus on security as an individual problem, and

Figure 6: Social Topics.



devoting less space to poverty and social stratification. The texts of the 1960's continued this trend, devoting little space to social welfare, and confining their treatment to discussion of social security and private life insurance programs. By the most recent period, with one exception, the texts tended to omit social welfare concerns or to question the necessity for government social programs. Social reform had become passe.

In summary, though space allocation was governed by internal factors, detailed text treatment of the role of government in economic matters tended to follow the patterns created by external crises and concerns, as text authors discussed the possibilities for reform during periods of crisis and omitted discussion of economic controversies during periods of prosperity. Discussion of social welfare followed mainstream ideological shifts, devoting more attention to critical issues during a shift to the left, and less during a shift to the right.

External

Though quantitative data on textbook space allocation for most of the other major topic areas shows a similar lack of correlation to public concern, textbook space allocated to international topics and to the culturally different was shaped largely by external trends. These were the only major topics for which public opinion and textbook trends displayed a strong similarity. In each case, changes in space allocation followed a shift in public opinion only after some lag.

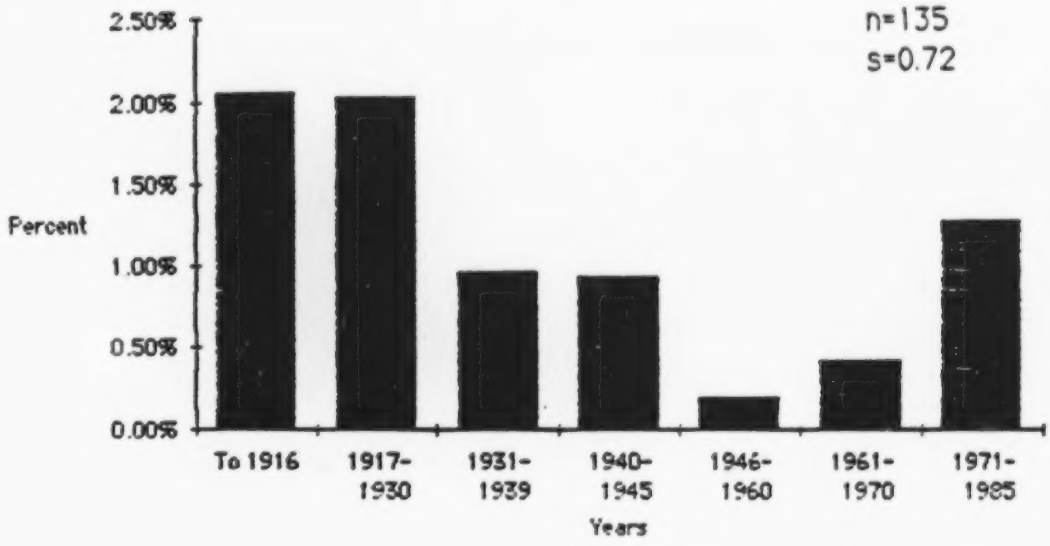
The Culturally Different. From the earliest period until World War II, the culturally different were usually treated as a threat, and to a lesser extent as an object of conscience, when they were discussed at all. Texts

of the progressive era discussed the problem of immigration, portraying "foreigners" as a threat to American standards of living or as Bolsheviks who posed a radical political threat. Yet, at the same time, they were also described as exploited workers who needed help if they were to be Americanized. All of the texts offered strong arguments for restricting immigration. Figure 7 shows peak concern over immigration during the earliest periods, a time during which nativists were clamoring for national restriction of immigration and the imposition of strict quotas. Text attention declined in the 1930's because the golden door had been closed, and declined again in the 1950's as immigration became a distant memory. A new wave of immigration created renewed concern, and increased text space during the most recent periods.

Texts of the 1930's fell strangely silent on the culturally different. Not until World War II and the racist dogma of Nazi Germany challenged Americans to eradicate racial prejudice did the texts renew attention to minorities, focusing significant attention on Blacks as an object of conscience, to be helped in their struggle for equal rights. Texts of the post-war era focused on legal restraints against discrimination and adjustment of students to "those who differ." Texts of the most recent periods continued to devote considerable attention to the rights of Blacks and other minorities, as an object of conscience in legal terms, to ensure that equality under the law would prevail. At no time were racial problems significantly linked to economic or institutional problems beyond a legal focus.

Textbook pages devoted to minority groups, prejudice and race, increased dramatically during the war years as reformers had a major

Figure 7: Textbook Pages Devoted to Immigration, Americanization.

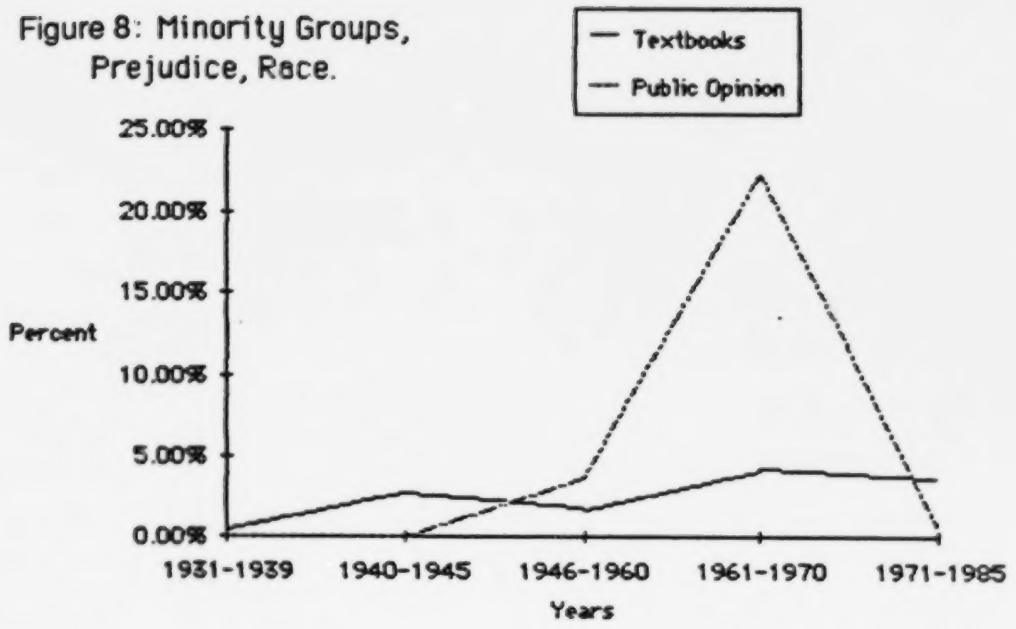


hand in shaping the curriculum, then peaked during the 1960's as the civil rights movement reached its climax and public concern reached its height, as shown in figure 8. Thus, textbook space allocation to and treatment of the culturally different was largely shaped by public concerns and external crises.

Competing Ideologies. Treatment of competing ideologies was shaped largely by the ideological orientation of text authors, the dictates of the textbook publishing industry and perceptions of major crises, especially the economic crisis of the depression and the international crisis of world war and ideological cold war. Radical doctrines were perceived mainly as a threat throughout the period under study. The major shift displayed by the texts has been one of degree. In times of perceived threats from abroad, treatment of competing ideologies has been most unfriendly as text authors promulgated the "defense of democracy." On the other hand, during a period of economic crisis, the depression, treatment of competing ideologies was most friendly as text authors asked "What can we learn from radical ideas?"

Texts of the earliest period favored what was then perceived as democratic capitalism, with government serving a regulatory role only as necessary to protect the public welfare. Communism, socialism and other competing ideologies were viewed as foreign and portrayed as a threat. Text of the 1920's strongly reflected the progressive faith in gradual social amelioration, but discussed competing ideologies as an argument favoring acceptance of capitalism, and as a source of ideas for social improvement. The texts of the 1920's often admitted the possiblility of a future move toward socialism, but only as the human race was improved

Figure 8: Minority Groups, Prejudice, Race.



and could handle such cooperation.

Though never embracing radical doctrines, the texts of the 1930's were exuberantly left-leaning. Socialism was nearly embraced by text authors who advocated a reformed democratic society in which economic inequalities would be minimized and "economic democracy" would be made a reality. Nevertheless, these texts, strongly influenced by social reconstructionism, continued to describe radical doctrines, totalitarian communism and fascism, as a threat to democracy. The texts published during World War II continued to advocate social reform, though they gave less attention to radical critiques of capitalism and focused more attention on the threat of totalitarianism to individual liberty, reflecting concerns brought by the war.

Texts of the post-war era and the 1960's were consumed with the threat of a monolithic totalitarian communism, and concentrated on indoctrinating students who would defend democracy. Radical theories were no longer a source of ideas to aid social improvement but were equated with "The Challenge of Communism" as other issues shrank in stature. The texts of the most recent period lauded the wonders of "free enterprise," as they contrasted capitalism with the command economies of the Soviet system. Though the colorful and confrontational rhetoric of the cold war era was gone, communism was still portrayed as a threat, with containment as the antidote. Thus, the perceived threat posed by competing ideologies had a major impact on the problems curriculum.

By far the most significant shift in text attention to competing ideologies was the increased emphasis on international topics resulting from an enlarged role in international affairs and the perceived threat of

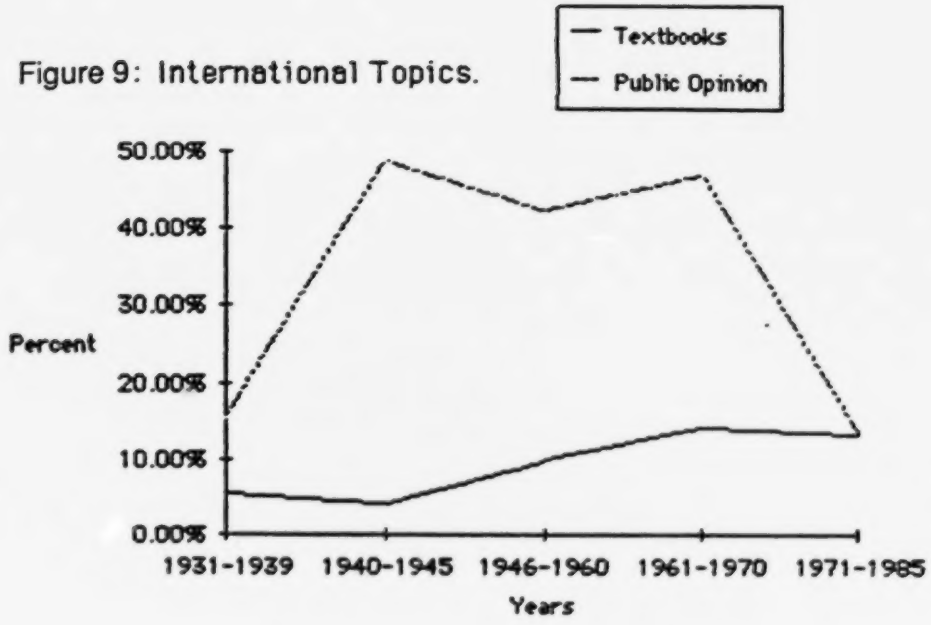
Communism. Space devoted to international topics increased from 4.03% during World War II to 14.01% by the 1960's. Figure 9 shows a strong similarity between public concern over international topics and increased text space, given some lag. Public concerns over international affairs, which peaked during the war and again during the 1960's led to a gradual increase in text space devoted to international topics. In sum, international concerns and the ideological anti-communism on which they were based had a profound impact on the treatment of societal problems, illustrating a major means by which external crises and the perceived threat they posed directly shaped the problems curriculum.

Discussion

The data presented in this study suggests that the ideological and normative orientation of educators in response to perceived crises is the key factor shaping the problems curriculum, though there is often a lag before changes affect space allocation by the texts. The text authors' concept of a "problem" combined with their perception of societal crises and trends, and the restrictions imposed by the publishing industry determine what makes the agenda, what is defined as a problem to be addressed by the worthy society. Thus, the problems curriculum was shaped primarily by educators but was denatured by external forces (including pressures on the publishing industry) and their impact on an educational establishment that seems permeable, guided by the dictates of fashion and market pressures. A society that is truly "worthy" deserves a more open approach to controversial issues grounded in a committment to academic freedom.

What does this history of the societal problems approach tell us about

Figure 9: International Topics.



curricular change in the social studies? Given the current dominance of the discipline-based social science courses and the general trend toward retrenchment, the outlook for the immediate future is not particularly hopeful. However, the history of the problems approach in the social studies provides several lessons for would be reformers. First, there is considerable evidence that reformers can have a major impact on the curriculum. The rise of the problems approach, the curricular impact of the reconstructionists, and of the life adjustment movement are all testimony to this fact. Though change is simultaneously incremental (internal) and crisis shaped (external) the creation of change was largely based on internal factors while the decline of reform was shaped by external forces, including the pressures felt by textbook publishers and attacks on "liberal" educators by conservative groups. Future efforts to reform the social studies must calculate the public's zone of toleration and be ready to answer criticism. If this study tells us anything about reform, it is that change is possible but difficult to sustain. Anything "different" is unlikely to last very long, especially anything controversial, innovative, or not firmly based in an academic discipline.

Second, the qualitative evidence suggests that the curriculum has been shaped by the ideological perspectives of educators, and the reaction of these perspectives to social, economic and international crises. One example of this occurred during the depression when reconstructionists and Frontier thinkers reacted to the severe economic crisis with calls for massive social and economic planning, a view which found its way into many of the textbooks of the period. Another occurred during the cold war when text writers and publishers found it necessary to indoctrinate

students to the threat of Communism.

These findings imply that the permeability of the problems curriculum to both the norms of educators and crises external to the educational establishment may be inevitable. We must recognize the non-neutral nature of knowledge, especially as it is transmitted in the curriculum. Knowledge and power interpenetrate to produce a curriculum which has, for the most part, supported the social and political status quo (Cherryholmes, 1983). The evidence presented in my dissertation is a testimony to the impact of dominant ideological predispositions. Those who have questioned structural aspects of existing social arrangements have had least influence. This finding is a strong indictment of textbooks, textbook authors, and publishers. Textbooks are sensitive to controversy over their contents, but, at the same time, largely unresponsive to public concerns and deeper societal issues. In essence the texts are bland, lifeless tomes which have served to reinforce existing social inequities. Though some aspects of the issues curriculum should be shaped by current concerns and crises, we must be careful not to let a crisis mentality, such as that which developed during the post-war years, restrict the knowledge and ideas which are institutionalized in the curriculum. The incremental aspects of curricular reform in the social studies could be based instead on a philosophical foundation which centers on developing citizens as social critics, citizens who are challenged to develop their own ideological frame by examining basic issues such as race, peace and social class, the relatively stable set of issues underlying most of our societal problems.

Thus, we face a pressing need to identify and develop issue-areas of

lasting concern. These issue-areas could include most of the pressing issues of the day, but should focus on institutional aspects of the American economic, political, and social systems in an international context. Discussion of the problems of social stratification, inequality, institutionalized sexism, and racism must include a variety of critical perspectives from several points-of-view. In short, we must liberate the social studies from the dominance of mainstream ideological preconceptions and the essential blandness which this perspective has imposed on the selection and organization of curricular content.

This will not be an easy task given the tendency of the textbook publishing and marketing process to eviscerate materials of controversial content. One solution to this dilemma might be to develop non-profit corporations, run by educators which would develop alternative textbooks at a price competitive with the commercially produced variety. Though this idea may not be very realistic, it is increasingly possible in an age of high technology and could conceivably allow greater innovation and inclusion of more varied ideological perspectives. Professor Richard Gross once suggested someting similar to the publications board of the National Council for the Social Studies. Their response was that they could not compete with the major source of funding for their annual meetings, the publishers. (Gross, 1986)

Despite such obstacles, those charged with shaping the future of the social studies curricula for America's schools must make every effort to break the ideological boundaries which currently limit the profession and which govern what passes for knowledge in our schools. The Deweyan vision of the "worthy society" that is both "lovely and harmonious" and

attainable has endured numerous revisions with the changing socio-political realities. The problems that inspired the progressive reformers who were responsible for the germination of the problems approach are still with us, though in different forms. How they will be addressed by coming generations, indeed, how the "worthy society" will be defined, remains to be seen.

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